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Mary Ellen Petrisko

July 15, 2015

Dr. Judith Greig  
President  
Notre Dame de Namur University  
1500 Ralston Avenue  
Belmont, CA 94002-1908

Dear President Greig:

At its meeting June 17-19, 2015, the Commission considered the report of the review team that conducted the Accreditation Visit (AV) to Notre Dame de Namur University (NDNU) March 25-27, 2015. Commission members reviewed the institutional report prepared by Notre Dame de Namur University prior to the Offsite Review (OSR), any supplemental materials requested by the team following the OSR, and the institution's May 26, 2015, response to the visiting team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues: Paul Ewald, Provost; and, Gregory White, Associate Provost and Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

This reaffirmation review was conducted in keeping with the *2013 Handbook of Accreditation*, which requires institutions to address several components in their institutional reports. NDNU was also requested to address issues from previous Commission action letters including the January 28, 2011, Interim Report that was requested as a result of a March 3, 2010, Special Visit. The January 2011 Interim Report action letter urged attention to enrollment and program prioritization; both are addressed in the discussion to follow.

With regard to each of the components in the institutional report, the team found the following:

**Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of the Degrees:** NDNU has a very clear and commonly held sense of mission and purpose and strives to serve "...as a leader in integrating community engagement into high quality academic programs" in its undergraduate offerings. These programs synthesize liberal arts learning, professionally-oriented learning, and institutional core values. NDNU offers the nation's first Ph.D. in Art Therapy and several masters programs that were found by the team to be both intellectually rigorous and of practical application. (CFRs 1.1 1.2, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.4)

**Core Competencies:** NDNU's institutional learning outcomes (ILOs), focused primarily on undergraduate programs, align closely with the five core competences. The Assessment Council, central to the university's assessment efforts, trains faculty and staff on ILO assessment and provides leadership in using assessment results in programmatic decision-making. The assessment process includes a calendar of assessment activities, curriculum maps, rubrics, expected standards of performance, and regular "assessment of the assessment process." Faculty involvement is exhibited throughout the assessment process. By the time of the comprehensive review, NDNU had assessed three ILOs and found that each ILO met the expected standards of performance defined as having 75% of students achieve an average score of three on a five-point scale. The university's work with graduate program outcomes assessment is at a pilot stage and it, along with professional and online program assessment, requires additional development. (CFRs 2.2, 2.2a, 2.4, 2.6, 4.3)

**Student Learning, Retention, and Graduation:** According to the review team, "NDNU has a well-defined and widely agreed upon definition of student success, conceived of in a 'whole person' context." The university's Retention Council analyzes retention and completion data disaggregated by a variety of student characteristics and benchmarks retention and graduation data for first-time full-time students against those at peer institutions. NDNU has improved retention across student populations, including some underrepresented minority groups. At the same time, NDNU's African American (26%) and male (34%) students underperform relative to other student populations. The team concluded that "faculty and staff shortages, especially in the student life division, constrain the time and effort that can be dedicated to fully understanding and improving retention and academic progress." The team also determined that student success results will be improved by integrating curricular, co-curricular, and administrative efforts. (CFRs 1.2, 1.4, 2.7, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13)

**Program Review, Assessment, Use of Data:** The team found that NDNU has emerging strength in its assessment of student learning, program review and culture of continuous improvement. The university has quality assurance structures and processes in place to manage ILO assessment and program reviews and a commitment to provide robust faculty and staff development in this arena. NDNU is in the early stages of development of a Comprehensive Review structure for general education; the team encourages NDNU to make substantial progress with this work, recognizing that ILO assessment "...forms the cornerstone of general education assessment." (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 4.1)

Notwithstanding NDNU's commendable accomplishments since the last Comprehensive Review, improvements are still needed in this area. The quality of the reviews and action plans varies by program and division, with graduate programs less developed. The team concluded that current processes are overly complex and lengthy. Most importantly, the team found that NDNU needs to develop and maintain clear and consistent pathways between assessment and broader decision-making processes to inform planning, budgeting and improvement of academic programs. A refinement of assessment structures and processes will enhance sustainability; action plans based on assessment



results will inform resource allocation. According to the team, “the recent hire of the Director of Institutional Research is a positive step”; this position will be helpful in establishing bridges to connect assessment results with academic progress and student completion. (CFRs 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.2)

**Sustainability and Response to the Changing Ecology of Higher Education:**

According to the team, “NDNU has made significant strides toward financial sustainability since the last reaffirmation of accreditation review with strong financial management, effective fiscal discipline, clear data-driven planning, sound enrollment forecasting models, growth in endowment, and successful attainment of grants.” The team commended NDNU for its entrepreneurial approach to the changing economy and higher education environment; maintaining the university’s commitment to access, particularly for Latino/a, first-generation, and low-income students; pursuing business models relevant to financially fragile small, private institutions; and, exploring technology-mediated educational delivery to meet student demands. (CFRs 3.4, 3.5, 4.7)

The team concluded that faculty and staff capacity does not align with workload demands and that greater clarity of decision-making processes and structures, increased transparency, and better communication are needed for faculty to exercise effective academic leadership and staff to meet their responsibilities. Finally, the team concluded that additional instructional technology resources, training and support are required to meet current need and to expand distance education offerings. (CFRs 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.10)

The Commission endorses the commendations and recommendations of the team, as detailed on pages 42-45 of the team report, and as otherwise noted in the team report narrative. The institution should respond to the recommendations in its next review.

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the team report
2. Reaffirm accreditation for eight years
3. Schedule the Offsite Review in fall 2022
4. Schedule the Accreditation Visit in spring 2023
5. Schedule a Mid-Cycle Review in spring 2019
6. Schedule an Interim Report in fall 2018 to review progress on the following issues cited in the team report:
  - a. Hiring plan for faculty and staff, including strategies to continue to increase diversity, and plans for faculty and staff development.
  - b. Clarification of decision-making structures and processes including streamlining committees, councils, and commissions.

- c. Report on increased and diversified revenues.
- d. Technology plan to improve infrastructure and prepare for technology-mediated educational delivery.
- e. Evidence of the use of direct assessment measures and assessment data to inform planning, budget, and resource allocation.
- f. Retention and graduation rates data, 2015-2018.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Notre Dame de Namur University has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Student Learning and Success; Quality and Improvement; and Institutional Integrity, Sustainability, and Accountability. Notre Dame de Namur University has successfully completed the multi-stage review conducted under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to maintain its compliance with WSCUC standards and uphold its commitment to continuous quality improvement.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the Notre Dame de Namur University governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the Notre Dame de Namur University website and widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in these documents. The team report and the Commission's action letter will also be posted on the WSCUC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WSCUC will post a link to that response.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that Notre Dame de Namur University undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while contributing to public accountability, and we thank you for your continued participation in this process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Petrisko  
President

MEP/mam

Cc: William Ladusaw, WSCUC Commission Chair  
Anne Hannigan, NDNU Board Chair  
Members of the reaffirmation team  
Maureen A. Maloney, WSCUC Vice President